



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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Dear Dave:

This letter summarizes our December 3–4 field examination of the Pinos Altos project area, located in the wildland-urban interface near Silver City. About 130 acres of ponderosa pine forest have been thinned here within the past two years, and an additional 15 acres have recently been marked for cutting.

Most of the treated area has clearly benefited in terms of improved tree vigor and reduction in fire hazard. There is some concern with the level of dwarf mistletoe infestation. Probably about 40% of the project area (i.e., the 145 acres thinned or marked) is currently infested. As is typical, the mistletoe here has a very patchy distribution. There appear to be 3 or 4 major “infection centers,” each several acres in size. Within these centers, most of the pines are visibly infected, and many others can be expected to have latent infection. Compared with our previous visit in 2006, the mistletoe now seems more abundant and vigorous, probably reflecting better moisture conditions the past two years, as well as “release” of both host and pathogen following the recent thinning.

Aggressive, truly effective mistletoe control in this area would require removal of most, if not all, of the pines over many acres. Given that the primary management objectives here are reducing fire hazard and maintaining visual quality, this approach is probably not warranted. The present lack of a market for cut material is another consideration. Some options we discussed for future management of this area include additional mistletoe sanitation and planting of non-host conifers.

Periodic removal of heavily-infected trees could be part of a long-term fuels-reduction strategy for this area, although its effect on mistletoe spread would be negligible. Additional sanitation efforts might eventually be considered in some portions to protect young pine regeneration and promote a new age class. Most of the existing advanced (> 10 year-old) pine regeneration is already infected. However, we observed very young (2-3 year-old) seedlings in some locations, and it would be prudent to monitor the extent and development of this new cohort. Plantings of southwestern white pine and/or Chihuahua pine might also be considered. Both species are reported to be highly resistant or immune to ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe.

Please contact me at (505) 842-3288 if you have additional questions or need further assistance.

Sincerely,

/s/ David A. Conklin
DAVID A. CONKLIN
Forest Pathologist, Forest Health, New Mexico
Zone



cc: Debra Allen-Reid
Don Bright